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HERBERT SPENCER'S FACTS AND INFERENCES.

IN reviewing Mr. Herbert Spencer's work in the domain of social science, two methods of criticism are open to me. I may attempt to cover the whole of the vast field which he traverses, and confine myself to general statements more or less vague, or I may restrict myself to special points. As I prefer to be precise, I select the latter method, and shall endeavor so to choose the points, that the reader may be able to form an opinion concerning the trustworthiness of Mr. Spencer's data and the value of his inductions; and to judge whether the social theories, based largely on these data and inductions on the one hand, and on dogmatic assertions on the other, are or are not tainted with fallacies.

First. Some data and inductions.

As Mr. Spencer's system is mainly inductive, and as he is compelled to rely on other writers for his information, it is important to note, at the outset, that he does not always correctly apprehend the authors to whom he refers. A notable instance of this is found in his essay on "The Social Organism," wherein he claims to give Plato's idea of the State: *

"The central idea of Plato's model Republic is the correspondence between the parts of a society and the faculties of the human mind. Classifying these faculties under the head of Reason, Will, and Passion, he classifies the members of his ideal society under what he regards as three analogous heads:—councilors, who are to exercise government; military, or executive, who are to fulfill their behests; and the commonalty, bent on gain and selfish gratification. In other words, the ruler, the warrior, and the craftsman are, according to him, the analogues of our reflective, volitional, and emotional powers."

* "Illustrations of Universal Progress," Appleton's edition, 1883, pp. 376-7.

Mr. Spencer criticises this analogy, and his criticism would be just if Plato had ever claimed that such an analogy existed. But the ancient philosopher never said anything so absurd as that the military, who are to fulfill the behests of the councilors, represent the volitional faculty of the body politic. He logically predicates volition of all classes of society; and warns, moreover, emphatically against the dangers arising to the State if the will of the military or the industrial classes predominate over that of the scientific, or regulative class, and shows that such a predominance is as productive of evil to the State, as the predominance of the will of the impulses and desires over that of reason is to the individual.*

In the "Data of Ethics"† occurs another and even more startling misapprehension of Plato's theory. There he puts into the mouth of the philosopher, whose great aim is to teach the absolute being of Truth and Justice, the monstrous statement that "State enactments" are "the sources of right and wrong." Words to this effect may, indeed, be found in the "Republic,"‡ but they are uttered by Thrasymachus, the sophist, and then exposed in all their bareness, and castigated by the un pitying irony of Socrates, the philosopher.

The name of Plato calls to mind an art which forms an essential factor in the Platonic state; and so, at this juncture, an inquiry into Mr. Spencer's views concerning the evolution of music suggests itself.

In order to show how music was developed from the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, Mr. Spencer begins thus: §

"As argued by Dr. Burney, and as implied by the customs of still extant barbarous races, the first musical instruments were, without doubt, percussive sticks, calabashes, tom-toms, and were used simply to mark the time of the dance; and, in this constant repetition of the same sound, we see music in its most homogeneous form. The Egyptians had a lyre of three strings."

* In another part of his works,—*"The Principles of Sociology,"* p. 611,—Mr. Spencer asserts that Plato, in his *Republic*, compares "the reason, passion, and desire," in the individual, to "the counsellors, auxiliaries, and traders" in the State. Now, either passion and "the will" (not to speak of "desire and passion") are synonymous terms, or our author contradicts himself. I am surprised to find that in the note, pp. 613-4, while referring to essay quoted above, Mr. Spencer makes no attempt to reconcile his conflicting statements.

† "Data of Ethics," Appleton's edition, p. 51.

‡ Jowett's "Plato," second edition, Vol. III., p. 207.

§ "First Principles," fourth edition, p. 356.

In this fashion Mr. Spencer continues tracing the history of music among the Greeks and during the Middle Ages in very remarkable outlines. He concludes: "And from the fugue to concerted music in two, three, four, and more parts, the transition was easy."* Now, in the first place, Dr. Burney, a writer of the last century, is no authority in the matter of ancient music. In the second place, a mere speculative argument is no datum on which an induction can properly be based. Thirdly. The two instruments for which he claims the remotest antiquity in the historical portion of his work are stringed instruments; the first, indeed, being "furnished with a neck," by means of which "simple and commodious" expedient the number of tones its two strings produced was considerable;† and the second, an elegant harp of thirteen strings.‡ Fourthly. The barbarous races "still extant" not only rival our grand orchestras in the possession of sticks and tom-toms, but also in that of horns, flutes, and stringed instruments.|| Fifthly. Though the early Egyptians had a lyre of three strings, an induction regarding the state of Egyptian music based on this fact alone is as fallacious as would be one concerning modern music based on the sole testimony of the accordeon. The original sources of our information, the monuments, attest that a great variety of stringed instruments, not to mention horns, flutes, and other wind instruments, were contemporaneous with and of even greater antiquity than the three-stringed lyre. It were heaping Pelion on Ossa to add that Dr. Ambros, a recent and distinguished author, maintains that, as far as we know, the most ancient lyre known to the Egyptians is one of eight strings. §

Lastly, as to Mr. Spencer's opinion concerning the transition from the fugue to music in two and more parts, it partakes rather of the character of American humor than of scientific investigation. It is as though one should say that the development of the isosceles triangle into a figure of three sides was not attended by difficulties.

I have no doubt that many of my readers will be inclined to think lightly of the fact that Mr. Spencer, occupied as he is with the history of the world and all contained therein, is not at home

* "First Principles," fourth edition, p. 357.

† Burney's "History of Music," ed. 1789, Vol. I., p. 197.

‡ *Ib.*, p. 214.

|| A. W. Ambros's "Geschichte der Musik," Vol. I., p. 12.

§ *Ib.*, Vol. I., p. 151.

in such comparatively trifling matters as the technical terms of music, notwithstanding that he may find it necessary to write about them. Unfortunately, however, he misconceives terms of a more important nature, and thus is led into glaring fallacies arising from the use of the same word in two different senses. For instance, in his "Political Institutions," he bases one of his most important generalizations—the progress of society from "Militancy" to "Industrialism"—among other facts, on this one, that, in contradistinction to the Middle Ages, war is no longer the business of all freemen.*

Leaving aside all other criticisms, it is sufficient to point out that while in the Middle Ages the word "freemen" was predicated of a class, and often of a very small class, to-day it is predicated of the entire population.

An equally remarkable instance of Mr. Spencer's confusion of different meanings of the same word, and also an instance of his want of historical accuracy,—two defects fatal to inductive reasoning, depending as it does on the correctness of all particulars,—may be found in the essay, "Manners and Fashion." †

He attempts there to prove that the numerous titles of rank are the result of the "continual degradation of all names of honor," and of the necessity of introducing new ones having that distinguishing effect which the originals had lost by generality of use. Among the many so-called historical data on which he relies, I select the following:

"Again, Knighthood, the oldest kind of dignity, is also the lowest, and Knight Bachelor, which is the lowest order of Knighthood, is more ancient than any other of the orders. Similarly, too, with the Peerage; Baron is alike the earliest and least elevated of its divisions."

Here it is to be remarked, in the first place, that the word "Knighthood" has at least three distinct meanings, and that, consequently, the sentence in which it occurs has too little scientific exactness for a datum on which an induction may be based. In the second place, in whatever sense the word be considered, Mr. Spencer's history is incorrect.

* "Political Institutions," p. 619.

† "Illustrations of Universal Progress," pp. 75-6. This essay being so full of errors, I half imagined that Mr. Spencer must have repudiated it, until I found it referred to, in the last edition of the "First Principles," as furnishing the "detailed proof" of his "assertions" there made, p. 344.

Knighthood is not the oldest kind of dignity, and the Knights of the most Noble Order of the Garter, at least, must have been astonished to learn that their dignity is the lowest. Knight Bachelor, contrary to the requirements of Mr. Spencer's theory, is of a more recent date than the higher grade of Knight Banneret. The name Baron, in its present signification, as a title of nobility, dates from the year 1387, and is, consequently, more recent than the title of Earl, which was first conferred independently of office in 1328; more recent than the title of Duke, conferred in 1337; and of Marquis, dating from 1385; while in its older signification, it was not a title of nobility, but the general designation of all crown tenants. And it is curious to note, that if we follow to their sources both the terms instanced by Mr. Spencer, no less than others equally high sounding, such as Prime Minister or Field Marshal, we find them originally applied to servants and slaves; and thus the witnesses cited by Mr. Spencer, to testify that titles are the result of degradation of names of honor, tend rather to prove the contrary.

But I have given as many illustrations of Mr. Spencer's misapprehension of historical data as space permits, and must pass on to the consideration of the half-truths which he derives from imperfect, partial, and one-sided observation. A striking illustration of these may be found in his so-called "Law of Evolution."

Mr. Spencer claims that the evolution of society (as well as that of the organic and the inorganic world) consists in a change from the less coherent to the more coherent, accompanied by a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.

Now, I do not deny that in some particular epochs, or viewed from some particular aspects, evolution manifests itself by such a change. I maintain, however, that in other epochs, or viewed from other aspects, it is manifested by a change in the opposite direction. Considering, for example, the evolution of Germanic society, we find that the families are constantly entering into closer relations with the tribe, and the tribes coming gradually into the closer coherence of the State. So far, Mr. Spencer is right. But, then, the greater coherence of the tribe is obtained at the expense of the coherence of the family, and the greater coherence of the State by a diminution of coherence in the tribe and the province. So that, viewed from the aspect of the nation, the tendency has been toward integration; viewed from

the aspect of the family and tribe, it has been toward disintegration. Likewise, if we consider social movements by epochs, we find progress at one time taking the form of an increase of coherence; at another time, of a decrease of coherence. The rise of the Roman Empire manifests the former phenomenon, the invasion of the barbarians furnishes us with an example of the latter; the Papal supremacy shows progress by means of aggregation and integration; the Reformation, by means of segregation and disintegration. Our own times show a simultaneous tendency toward less coherence in subordinate political corporations, toward greater coherence in the State, and toward a separation into distinct nationalities, with political independence and industrial segregation.

Mr. Spencer, in order to cramp evolution into the artificial boundaries he has set for it, resorts to artificial breaks in progress, invokes dissolution or involution; in order to support his half-truth, he voluntarily reduces himself to a semi-evolutionist. It need, however, hardly be pointed out that if evolution be a truth, there can be no break in it; that no particular phase of history, or of the social movement, can claim for itself a monopoly of the principle; that the Papacy and the aggregation of the tribes into an European empire are links in the same chain of which the Reformation and the segregation of the empire into distinct nationalities are others; that the tendencies toward the less coherent in the family, the tribe, the caste, and the province, are the necessary concomitants of those toward the more coherent in the State. Nor can these strictures be in part eluded by the argument that the Reformation and the nationalities instance the secondary form of evolution as interpreted by Mr. Spencer; namely, the change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. For the very essence of his doctrine is that the greater heterogeneity is the essential concomitant of the greater coherence; that the two forms are, in reality, identical, and cannot exist without each other.

But that social progress does not always take the form of a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous has already been pointed out by Mr. Cliffe Leslie,* who has shown that the movement of "language, law, and political and civil unions is, for the most part, in an opposite direction." Mr. Spencer at-

* "Fortnightly Review," January, 1879

tempts to diminish the force of this criticism by contending that what Mr. Leslie had in mind is a "progressing unification,"* a tendency toward greater coherence and not toward greater homogeneity. But I cannot consider his argument a valid one. Taking, for example, the France of Louis XIV., we find a unified State with very heterogeneous elements; and it appears to me that whatever progress it may have made has been toward the homogeneity of these elements. However, I need hardly enlarge on this point, as Mr. Spencer himself asserts that the population of Great Britain is approximately homogeneous in character.† Certainly, he could not say this of the British population in the Middle Ages, with its Normans, Saxons, Welshmen, Lowlanders, Highlanders, and other heterogeneous elements too numerous to mention. And so, even if we admit all the testimony with which Mr. Spencer seeks to prove his proposition, we find that it is only a half-truth, and requires to be complemented by the other half, its exact opposite.

Thus we have found that the much-quoted "law of evolution" is no law whatever; that it is not even a tendency subordinate to the human will;‡ nor, indeed, an induction; nor in any sense a scientific proposition. In short, that it is not the formulation of objective observation, but simply a subjective fancy.§

Yet, a still more striking example of Mr. Spencer's one-sidedness is furnished by what I consider his most wide-reaching and important generalization in the field of social science, and one most likely to entail practical consequences. It is that, with the advance of civilization, "status passes into contract."|| But this half-truth, at the present juncture of social questions, is so full of danger to society, that I must hasten to complete it by adding to it the other and better half: "and contract passes into

* "First Principles," p. 572.

† "Study of Sociology," p. 350.

‡ "Study of Sociology," p. 401.

§ The reader may miss any reference to the portion of Mr. Spencer's law according to which evolution proceeds, also from the indefinite to the definite. ("First Principles," 361-380.) I have not considered it, because it is not so much an illustration of Mr. Spencer's imperfect observation of society as of his confounding subjective impression with objective reality. I need hardly suggest that objects are all necessarily equally and completely definite, and that the indefiniteness can exist only in our conceptions of them.

|| "Data of Ethics," p. 239. For a full elaboration of what Mr. Spencer calls the passing from the *régime* of status into the *régime* of contract, see "Political Institutions," particularly chap. xviii.

status." Expressing the whole truth in a less oracular form, we have: progress in civilization is partly caused and partly attended by an increase of the freedom of contracting in some directions; but this increase is merely the result of a diminution of the freedom of contracting in other directions.

I shall adduce only a few instances to substantiate my assertion.

Among the ancient Germans, crimes were considered private injuries, and the retribution was allowed to be settled by a contract between the offended party or his family and the offender. To-day, the commission of a crime confers a status on the offender from which no private contract can free him. Indeed, the offended party becomes himself a criminal as a compounder of felony, if he attempts by contract to aid the criminal in eluding punishment by the public authorities.

But it is hardly necessary to cite special cases, when the modern State is itself an evolution from the condition of a society resting on the basis of contract into one resting on the basis of status. In the Middle Ages, all government was of a private character, founded on the relations of landlord and tenant, with the condition of protection on the one side and service on the other, the breach of the condition by either party relieving the other. All constitutions were contracts between king and people, based on mutual assent and considerations, and differed in no manner from private charters. The modern State, on the other hand, repudiates all notion of contract in the relations of the citizen to the State, and its constitutions are utterly inconsistent with the notion of contracting parties. In short, contrary to Mr. Spencer's doctrine, the *régime* of contract has, with advancing civilization, been superseded by the *régime* of status.*

Second. Mr. Spencer's dogmas.

Of these, the most pertinent to our discussion are the following:

(1) In the social organism, "the welfare of the aggregate, considered apart from that of the units, is not an end to be sought. (2) The society exists for the benefit of its members; and not its members for the benefit of the society. (3) It has ever to be remembered that great as may be the efforts

* For a more detailed view of the evolution of the State and of civil liberty in the State by a progressive restriction of the right of contracting, I refer to my article, "A Definition of Liberty," in the January number of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, 1883.

made for the prosperity of the body politic, yet the claims of the body politic are nothing in themselves, and become something only in so far as they embody the claims of its component individuals." *

Fortunately for the cause of social progress, it is not difficult to demonstrate the falsity of these dogmas, for they disprove themselves.

By the words "units," "members," and "component individuals," Mr. Spencer must intend to designate either all the "units," all the "members," all the "component individuals," or a part of the "units," a part of the "members," a part of the "component individuals." In the former case, the welfare of the "aggregate" and that of the "units," the "benefit of society" and that of "its members," the claims of the "body politic" and those of "its component individuals" are identical and cannot be contrasted with each other. In the latter case, we have the absurd statement that the welfare of all is not an end to be sought, that the whole exists for the benefit of a part, and that the claims of the whole are nothing, while those of a fraction are everything.

Third. Mr. Spencer's political theories.

Relying principally on the dogmas thus instanced, and inductions of the kind criticised in this article, Mr. Spencer formulates his political theories:

The State is an establishment existing mainly for two purposes: First, to enforce private contracts; second, to act as policeman and police justice: and it has no right whatever to interfere with the individual excepting to the extent necessitated by these functions. † It has no right to establish free public education; for this is taxing one individual in order to educate the children of another. ‡ It has no right to establish a free public library; for this is taxing the "more worthy" who save in order to enable the "less worthy" who do not save to get free reading. § It has no right to establish hospitals and asylums; for this is robbing individuals of "money which otherwise would have furthered their private ends." || It has no right to make laws regulating public health, ¶ preventing the adulteration of

* "Principles of Sociology," pp. 479, 480.

† "Data of Ethics," pp. 146 and 138. See, also, "Political Institutions," pp. 530, 608, 610, 612; "Study of Sociology," pp. 286, 288.

‡ "Study of Sociology," p. 370, ; "Political Institutions," p. 612.

§ "Principles of Sociology," p. 605; "Political Institutions," p. 612; "Study of Sociology," p. 286.

|| "Political Institutions," p. 612; "Study of Sociology," pp. 367-370.

¶ "Study of Sociology," pp. 287-8; "Principles of Sociology," p. 604.

food,* prescribing rules of building,† establishing inspection of factories and mines,‡ or in any manner interfering with individuals so as to prevent them from conducting their businesses according to their own pleasure. In short, it has no right to prevent the unlimited exploitation of the weaker by the stronger, and it must allow the former to be crushed and destroyed in the struggle for existence, so that the latter may have full opportunity to survive.§

On the basis of false inductions and self-contradictory dogmas, he exalts private interests above public needs, and subordinates the most sacred rights of all to the supposed advantages of a few. Nor does he perceive that he is merely preaching the doctrine of the Middle Ages, which made freedom consist in the defiance of the sovereign and oppression of the serf. As little is he aware that his teaching is destructive of the public spirit, still so faintly developed, and, above all things, needing encouragement. In fine, while devoting many pages || to the discussion of various kinds of bias, he forgets a bias far more dangerous than any of those which he instances—unfortunately, his own peculiar bias—individualism. He forgets that in the modern State the individual is not only a citizen or subject, but also has an undivided share in the sovereignty, and that as far as he is a part of the sovereignty, he is higher and greater, enjoys higher and greater rights, and accepts higher and greater duties than those of a subject. And forgetting this, in the one-sidedness so characteristic of his political speculations, he is not sufficiently impressed with the fact that the Government is the agent of the sovereignty; and that the end of political teaching ought to be the establishment of harmony between the sovereign and its agent in order that the will of the former may be well executed, and not to increase the discord between the Government and the individual, and thus lame the only arm by which the sovereignty may protect all against aggression from without and within. Nor can the altruism which he invokes take the place of the public spirit which he kills, for he himself has shown that when carried to its correct logical conclusion, it becomes an absurdity.¶

In conclusion, a definition of the term “public spirit” may

* “Study of Sociology,” p.605.

† *Ib.*, pp. 287-8.

‡ “Political Institutions,” p.612; “Principles of Sociology,” p. 605.

§ “Political Institutions,” pp. 610-613.

|| Chapters VIII-XII, “Study of Sociology.”

¶ “Data of Ethics,” pp. 228, 229, 233, 235.

not be out of place, for it will, perhaps, furnish the best answer to the doctrines of the author with whom we have occupied ourselves.

Just as in the joint ownership of an object, each of the proprietors has an undivided share in the whole and every part, so in the State each citizen has an undivided share in the sovereignty, an interest in the whole State and every part of it. In other words, to the extent of his share every citizen contains the whole State within himself; and as he rises in the scale of political consciousness, he subordinates his individualistic ego to this greater ego, in which the all is contained. And it is this consciousness which is the public spirit. It is this which makes the possessor of it feel that every co-member of the State is a part of himself, though it be the tramp infesting the highway, or the criminal serving a term in the State's prison. It is by this consciousness that he perceives the folly of those doctrines which teach him that if the inferior part of himself is left to destruction, the superior part will survive;* that if the diseases of the body politic are permitted to run on without check, they will, by killing the diseased portions, impart a blooming health to the whole. And it is by this consciousness that he perceives that it is the imperative duty of the State to raise the degraded, to educate the ignorant, to relieve the oppressed; and that if it fail to fulfill this duty, it will inevitably suffer all the ills resulting from ignorance, degradation, and oppression.

And the developing of the public spirit, of the appreciation that the sovereign within ourselves ought to rule over the subject within ourselves, must, if we wish to be preserved, form the foundation of our education, as well in the school as in the press, in the rostrum as in the pulpit. And in the measure that this is accomplished, our legislature and judiciary and civil service will become purer; for the private and lower interests of our governmental officers will then subordinate themselves to their higher and public interests. Thus, and only thus, the brutal struggle for a bare subsistence on the one side, and endless accumulation on the other, with its attendant class hatred, monopolies, and corruption, now threatening to engulf us in a vortex of ruin, will gradually give way to a healthful, honest, and hearty coöperation of all for the benefit of all.

ISAAC L. RICE.

* "Political Institutions," p. 610; "Study of Sociology," pp. 339-346, 353.